

Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art, philosophy and psycho-analysis –
<https://inscriptions.tankebanen.no/>

Title: Entropy in literature and philosophy: time lost in Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition*

Author: Jørgen Veisland

Section: Academic articles

Abstract: Quantum physics is uniquely equipped as a science to abridge the gap between the physical and the spiritual, the human and the animal. How this abridgment may come about will be shown in an examination of the basic concepts of quantum physics, highlighting entropy; of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy, notably the work *Repetition*; a selection of modern literary works; illustrations of quantum mechanics provided by links to impressionist and abstract painting; a sound track and video emulating thunder, and a discussion of music.

Keywords: quant; interdependence; entropy; the moment; modern painting; music

Copyright © 2024 Veisland.

Correspondence: Jørgen Veisland, e: jorgen.veisland@ug.edu.pl.

Received: 25 August, 2023.

Accepted: 3 November, 2023.

Published: 15 January, 2024.

How to cite: Veisland, Jørgen. "Entropy in literature and philosophy: time lost in Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition*." *Inscriptions* 7, no. 1 (January 2024): 33-49.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Entropy in literature and philosophy: time lost in Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition*

Jørgen Veisland¹

Abstract

Quantum physics is uniquely equipped as a science to abridge the gap between the physical and the spiritual, the human and the animal. How this abridgment may come about will be shown in an examination of the basic concepts of quantum physics, highlighting entropy; of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy, notably the work *Repetition*; a selection of modern literary works; illustrations of quantum mechanics provided by links to impressionist and abstract painting; a sound track and video emulating thunder, and a discussion of music.


Keywords: quant; interdependence; entropy; the moment; modern painting; music

Time, mind and vision

Does nature have a consciousness, a mind? Or differently put, *is* nature mind? Evidence gathered from quantum physics, philosophy and epistemology indicates that yes, nature is mind. A ubiquitous presence and exchange of massive information and complex, interrelated chemical processes characterize a universe made up of the smallest possible energy packages, the so-called quants. Scientific insight into the activity of quants suggests that it makes no sense to distinguish between the 'physical' and the 'spiritual' dimensions of this energy. Clinging to such a distinction is conducive to grave epistemological errors, some of which are predicated upon the exclusion of feeling and emotion from the cognitive process. Moreover, said distinction has led to fatal discriminations and defective logical thinking when it comes to theoretical research that would categorize the human individual as not only genetically and intellectually different from the rest of creation

but also as superior to nature because of humanity's claimed innate 'spiritual' and 'intellectual' endowments.

A look at Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy and an assortment of modern literature will serve to indicate how a stable human identity is undercut by the behavior of the quant which shows us that there is no identity, only activity, interdependence and events. The effect of research into the quant is to place into serious doubt the issues of separateness and identity, a doubt leading to the conclusion that individuality is in a process of continuous self-generated change. This change aims not at stabilizing individuality but at creating it. Kierkegaard's concept of the *moment* may be described as a spatiotemporal dimension, an intersection of time and eternity engendered by the energetic activity of the quant. Space and time coalesce in the briefest of instants, and here we can detect no difference between the physical and the spiritual. Contemporary research

¹Scandinavian Institute, University of Gdańsk.  orcid.org/0000-0002-0176-4534.

in quantum physics concludes that space and time are granular, that temporal leaps are small and finite and that intervals of time in nature are minimal. I would characterize the *moment* as granular as well. The distinction between physics and metaphysics vanishes. Congruity exists between the discrete, minimal intervals of time in nature and the metaphysics of the moment. The physical and the metaphysical properties of nature and the cosmos are propelled by a common energetic impetus. Physical and metaphysical energy contain two major components, knowledge and vision which may be described as originating either simultaneously or sequentially, mind, in the latter case, being antecedent to vision.

In *Stella Maris* by Cormac McCarthy Alicia Western asks the question “Does something know? Is that possible? And if it does what must we become in order for it to tell us?”²

Given that theoretical physics and, especially, quantum physics, confirms upon observation and research that the universe possesses intelligence we may answer Alicia’s question in the affirmative: something *does* know. The next question we are confronted with is ‘what must we become in order for it to tell us?’ While reflecting upon the fact that the universe had been evolving for billions of years in darkness and silence she comments that “the first living creature possessed of vision agreed to imprint the universe upon its primitive and trembling sensorium and then to touch it with color and movement and memory.”³

In *Biocentrism* Robert Lanza notes:

modern knowledge of the brain shows that what appears “out there” is actually occurring within our own minds, with visual and tactile experiences located not in

some external disconnected location that we have grown accustomed to regarding as being distant from ourselves. Looking around, we see only our own mind or, perhaps, it’s better put that there is no true disconnect between external and internal.⁴

Alicia speaks of a darkness and a silence that is imprinted on the human sensorium and Lanza states that ‘we see only our own minds’. Do these assertions imply that the human mind projects itself upon the universe which otherwise would be without a mind? By no means. As we have established, quanta are energy packages and this energy possesses intelligence; but it is an intelligence without shape, substance and color: mind as a non-entity. Attaining knowledge of this mind means engaging in an epistemological project culminating in insight. Insight is knowledge and vision, or knowledge as vision. However, vision may be deflected so that it turns into blindness – although blindness is also a form of vision, the perception of a pale reflection, shadows on the wall of the cave, Michel Foucault discusses the two forms of vision: a vision seeking transparency and truth, Cartesian reflection, and a transgressive vision of *dépense*, Georges Bataille’s eye to which all sight is denied. In *Downcast Eyes* Martin Jay explains how the epistemological problematic of vision and insight involves the distinction between resemblance and similitude: “[...] resemblances always affirmatively assert the irreducible sameness of image and object based on the original status of the latter.”⁵ According to Foucault, similitude, by contrast, manifests a multiplication of different affirmations. Jay comments that “the orders of the visible and sayable, most explicitly at odds in the similitudi-

²McCarthy, *Stella Maris*, 66.

³*Ibid.*, 40.

⁴Lanza, *Biocentrism*, 39.

⁵Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 400.

⁶*Loc. cit.*

nous discordance between Magritte's images and their mysterious titles"⁶ are non-related. In *This Is Not a Pipe* Foucault comments on Bataille's vision of *dépense*: "[...] the eye is seen absolutely, but denied any possibility of sight; the philosophical subject has been dispossessed and pursued to its limit."⁷

The post-Renaissance separation of icon and object is conducive to a split in the image itself, a dichotomy between resemblance and similitude. Iconic resemblance is assigned a role in an epistemological project designed to re-instate the oneness of icon and object. The energy with which this project is pursued leads to a new dichotomy in representation. Dichotomy is now inserted within the image in a two-fold manner: firstly, as a distinction between resemblance and similitude; and secondly, as a forceful, in fact violent negation of the eye that is denied sight in Bataille, as noted by Foucault. This negation is extended into a discordance, a non-relation, between 'the orders of the visible and the sayable', as Martin Jay comments.

The epistemological project whose goal is to re-instate one-ness contains a further layer, an additional dimension: time and narrative. Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* is ample testimony to a narrative pursuit bent on a transmutation of blindness, invisibility into a transient yet indelible visibility in the work of art. This transmutation is tied to the treatment of time in Proust's narrative. In *Mimesis* Erich Auerbach discusses Proust's *Swann's Way*, commenting that Proust's technique is "bound up with a recovery of lost realities in remembrance, a recovery released by some externally insignificant and apparently accidental occurrence."⁸ The taste of a cake, the *petite Madeleine*, is an example of this recovery; the taste arouses intense delight in the narrator, Marcel. Auerbach states that "from this

recovered remembrance, the world of his childhood emerges into light, becomes depictable, as more genuine and more real than any experienced present – and he begins to narrate."⁹ Consciousness is freed from earlier subjective involvements, Auerbach notes, so that the mind "views its own past layers and their content in perspective" and confronts them with one another, "emancipating them from their exterior temporal continuity as well as from the narrow meanings they seemed to have when they were bound to a particular present."¹⁰

Perspective, emancipation from temporal continuity, and 'a particular present' are significant terms. The emancipation of consciousness from temporal continuity and from a particular present is conducive to an epistemological project whose scope is vastly expanded. When *temps perdu*, time lost, is recovered, the mind is liberated and narration may commence. Narration in Proust as in Kierkegaard is imbued with an epistemological intent the significance and scope of which must be examined using a new scientific framework, quantum physics. The insights gained in early 20th century and in contemporary scientific research as well as the methods used in the laboratory facilitate a perspective on the objects of the universe and the objects of language involving a new paradigm: entropy. Entropy is a concept developed in quantum physics and is applicable to literature and philosophy because it tries to transcend the border between vision, here understood as the observing eye of the scientist, and object, atoms and electrons. The purpose of entropy is to transform a distant view of the object to a close-up of the object by going through a gradual motion away from order towards a state of disorder where the particular composition of the object is revealed. The gradual, discrete and complex transformation of order

⁷Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 46.

⁸Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 541.

⁹*Loc. cit.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 542.

into disorder is a method that clearly abolishes, or tries to abolish, the dichotomy between the observing subject and the object observed. The scientific and epistemological insight arrived at in quantum physics significantly enhances our understanding of narrative, in particular the process of repetition. A brief description of the science of quantum physics will facilitate an understanding of how the concept of entropy and other related concepts may aid our reading of literature.

Quantum physics: entropy, granularity, indeterminacy, relationality

In the Penguin English Dictionary's definition of quantum, quanta is explicated as follows:

Quantum, quanta: "Discrete quantities that form the smallest units into which energy can be subdivided or by which it can increase or decrease".

In his book *The Order of Time* – a work where he elucidates the ideas and experiments of Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger and others – Carlo Rovelli writes:

The three fundamental discoveries that quantum mechanics has led to are these: granularity, indeterminacy and the relational aspect of physical variables. Each one of these demolishes further the little that was left of our idea of time.¹¹

The new concept of time that is derived from the insight of quantum mechanics is that time is not universal. Also, the difference between

past, present, and future is eliminated. Spacetime is a "gravitational field", "a field like the others" and "the world is a superimposition of canvases" where "the gravitational field is only one among the others". Moreover, it is not fixed, "it flexes, stretches and jostles with the others, pushing and pulling against them."¹² The physical quality 'granularity' is ubiquitous – for example, light is made of photons, grains of light. Pure air as well as dense matter are granular. Space and time are also granular. As Rovelli points out, "temporal leaps are small but finite", hence there are "minimal intervals of time" in nature.¹³ Furthermore, when applying the concept of indeterminacy we find that it is impossible to predict "where an electron will be tomorrow". Physicists say that "it is in a 'superposition' of positions", and spacetime can be in a superposition also.¹⁴ Finally, when an electron materializes by colliding with something, e.g. a photon or a screen, it "acquires a concrete position". However, "the electron is concrete only *in relation to* the other physical objects it is interacting with."¹⁵ Quanta are not stable, fixed entities – there are no entities or substances, there are only interrelations and events, meaning that the world is in a process of limitless change.

The physical principle governing this change is entropy (Greek: en-trepein, change, turn). Entropy is defined by the Penguin English Dictionary as follows: "The degree to which the particles of a thermodynamic system are randomly arranged, which gives a measure of the amount of disorder in the system." Rovelli notes that the history of the universe consists of a "halting and leaping growth of entropy", that is, a growth from low entropy meaning order towards a state of high entropy meaning disorder. An example would be a

¹¹Rovelli, *The Order of Time*, 73.

¹²*Ibid.*, 67.

¹³*Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 79.

cloud which when viewed from a distance, from a macroscopic perspective, seems massive and dense; but which when viewed close up, from a microscopic perspective, turns out to be fog made of tiny drops of liquid. Rovelli writes: “What causes events to happen in the world, what writes its history, is the irresistible mixing of all things, going from the few ordered configurations to the countless disordered ones.”¹⁶ – In “Does Time Exist?” the physicist Julian Barbour states: “shapes [...] are primary” and “motion is a reflection of differences between them”¹⁷, adding that “an instant of time is nothing to do with something outside the universe.”¹⁸ And: Motion in the universe is “a potential counterpart for the motion we experience in our inner life.”¹⁹ Outer and inner motions are not continuous but constitute the ‘mixing of all things’, tending in the direction of a disorder made up of countless configurations.

In his book *Helgoland* Rovelli explains the phenomenon of superposition, noting that we do not see the superposition, only its consequences which “are called ‘quantum interference’.”²⁰ He illustrates this by referring to a beam of photons separated into two by a prism, reunited and then divided again into two paths observed by a detector. If one of the two paths is blocked by a hand one half of the photons arrive in the upper detector, the other half in the lower detector. If there is no hand obstructing either path of the photons, all of the photons end up in the lower detector. This is called quantum interference. Science is unable to account for this phenomenon. Metaphysics may account for it.

Metaphysics: *Sunyata*

Research by the scientist Christian Thomas Kohl explores the relationship between Buddhist thought and quantum physics. In his book *Buddhismus und Quantenfysik* Kohl refers to Parmenides who pointed to the interdependence and exchangeability of contradictory phenomena, declaring that it is absurd to maintain the absolute separateness of phenomena, being/non-being, lasting/not lasting, solid/non-solid etc. The Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna, author of the work *The Fundamental Teachings of the Middle Way*, written in the 3rd century A.D., proposes that nothing exists as an essence or substance. The term for the non-substantial nature of things is *sunyata* which we may render as emptiness. Now, in the laboratory photons exhibit all the signs of interdependent, interchangeable behavior. In the universe, quants may exist both here and there at the same time. They exhibit no concrete features prior to being measured or observed. The concrete state of the quant is one of many potential states, the superpositions. We might put it this way: the quant leaps from a virtual state to a real state, from non-existence into existence. But the path of the quant, in casu the photon, from non-existence to existence defies observation. Hence the scientific riddle regarding quantum interference.

The artistic view of nature, predominantly that of non-figurative painting just before and just after 1900, can be exemplified by a number of stylistically revolutionary paintings. The examples serve as illustrations of the major concepts of quantum physics. They also make manifest a surprising coincidence between the insight into the world attained by the scientific mind and that of the artistic mind. The

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁷Barbour, “Does time exist?” 60.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 62.

²⁰Rovelli, *Helgoland*, 44.

understanding of nature arrived at by artists even predates a good portion of the research findings by 20th century physicists.

Non-figurative paintings



Figure 1: *Granularity*, illustrated by Georges Seurat's "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte".

Seurat, a pointiliste, perforates the rigid, statuesque figures of people by the river using dots. Hypothetically, the dots could have been connected by lines creating any number of different configurations. By accident we discern familiar outlines in the painting, human figures, trees, the lake, etc.



Figure 2: *Indeterminacy*, illustrated by Claude Monet's "Cathedrale de Rouen".

The multiple portraits of the cathedral paints not only the facade of the structure but captures the medium, the light and the atmosphere. The cathedral becomes many cathedrals at once. The ideal that something, anything, is at one with itself is obliterated.



Figure 3: *Relationality*, illustrated by Pablo Picasso's "Les demoiselles d'Avignon".

One facial representation, or rather dis-representation, becomes what it is only in relation to the other dis-representations. It is not a distortion – it is an exploration of the many faces under one face, accomplished by giving the mask the power to reveal numerous qualities, including subconscious elements. Picasso's painting is situated in the historical moment when naturalistic representation in painting, literature and psychoanalysis is undermined, giving way to a view of reality preconditioned upon profound sociopolitical changes and upon dream analysis, e.g. Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In *Das Passagenwerk*, volume V of *Gesammelte Schriften*, Walter Benjamin writes:

To the form of the new means of production which in the beginning is still dominated by the old one (Marx), there corre-

spond in the collective unconscious images in which the new is intermingled with the old. These images are wish images, and in them the collective attempts to transcend as well as to illumine the incompleteness of the social order of production.²¹

It is debatable to what extent Picasso's painting intermingles the new with the old. If the painting is a 'wish image' the wish consists in becoming emancipated from unified identity. This constitutes a break with the old.



Figure 4: *Low entropy, illustrated by Paul Cézanne's "Mont Sainte-Victoire".*

The broad brush strokes effectuate a macroscopic perspective, imposing a blurring tendency towards the abstract on the mountain, the landscape and the scattered houses. The view of the landscape is from a distance and creates a perspective whereby nature manifests itself as ordered; a state of low entropy is imposed upon the landscape.



Figure 5: *High entropy, illustrated by Claude Monet's "The Houses of Parliament. Effect of Fog".*

Monet's close-up of the Houses of Parliament and the Thames lends fluidity to the building, thus causing a blending of solid stone and non-solid water.



Figure 6: *Low entropy, illustrated by Camille Pissarro's "Boulevard Montmartre".*

Pissarro succeeds in representing a microscopic view of the Parisian boulevard where people and carriages traversing the street dissolve into the wetness of the surface and penetrate that surface, eliminating the difference between up and down, outside and inside.

²¹Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften I-VI*, 46.

²²This image is available to view at MoMA's webpage: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/33169>.

Also, superposition can be illustrated by Pablo Picasso's "Head of the Medical Student."²² Rather than using Schrödinger's cat as an example of superposition, *in casu*, the superposition of being awake and asleep at the same time, I have chosen Picasso's painting showing one eye closed and one eye open, that is, seeing and not seeing at the same time. The painting inspires an association to Søren Kierkegaard's concept (or rather, Vigilius Haufniensis' concept as developed in *The Concept of Anxiety*) the moment, the '*Øieblik*', literally 'the wink of an eye', a fragment of time, a quant of time partaking of time and eternity simultaneously, in the sense that the winking of the eye occurs in the briefest of moments while being suspended outside the flow of time. Being itself is located in a state in-between, *inter-esse*. The quant of time which partakes of time and eternity in an interval suspending Being from the flow of time corroborates the modernist experiment in emancipation and liberation evidenced in the modernist canon, e.g. James Joyce's *Ulysses* where Stephen Dedalus in a walk on the beach acutely senses all things by opening the eye and the ear, engaging the modalities of the visible and the audible. Myriad configurations manifest themselves, not as fragmentation but as a physical *cum* spiritual experience engendering a positive sense of life. The quant of time, observed and unobserved in the wink of the eye provides access to the totality of the cosmos in a fundamentally new way, thus enforcing and expanding modernist narrative.

Rovelli describes quants as:

the elementary grains that weave the mobile fabric with which Einstein reinterpreted Newton's absolute space and time. It is these, and their interactions, which determine the extension of space and the duration of time. The relations of spa-

tial adjacency tie the grains of space into webs. We call these 'spin networks'. [...] A ring in the spin network is called a *loop*, and these are the loops that give 'loop theory' its name.

The webs, in turn, transform into each other in discrete leaps, described in the theory as structures called 'spinfoam.'²³

Rovelli comments that on a large scale the leaps draw a pattern appearing like "the smooth structure of spacetime", while on a small scale the quantum spacetime is "fluctuating, probabilistic and discrete", and "there is only the frenzied swarming of quanta that appear and vanish."²⁴ The representation of spinfoam looks like a composite of the paintings by Cézanne, Monet and Pissarro.

Modern literature, here represented by a few citations from 20th and 21st century fiction and poetry, likewise provides access to an understanding of nature and the human mind, an understanding that often parallels and corroborates that of scientists.

Modern fiction and poetry

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* we come across the following conversation between Gatsby and the narrator, Nick Carraway:

"And she doesn't understand", he said. "She used to be able to understand. We'd sit for hours –"

He broke off and began to walk up and down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers.

"I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past."

"Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"²⁵

²³Rovelli, *The Order of Time*, 110.

²⁴*Loc. cit.*

²⁵Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 73.

Gatsby insists on fixing everything the way it was before. The narrator comments that his life had been confused and disordered since first meeting Daisy who married Tom in the meantime. Gatsby's wish to re-instate and relive the past is an effort to counteract the disorder of the present. The past is, concretely speaking, Gatsby's recollection of his love relationship with Daisy when young. A reiteration of the love experience is, so claims Gatsby, not only possible but natural and logical. The logic of recurrence, as produced by the author, not only generates meaning in the life of the characters and, by extension, in the life of the reader; recurrence also establishes narrative structure, a structure of repetition making fiction self-reflexive. Gatsby's logic of repetition is engendered by the author's creative and self-creative act. In *Fiction and Repetition* J. Hillis Miller writes: "Any novel is a complex tissue of repetitions and of repetitions within repetitions, or of repetitions linked in chain fashion to other repetitions. In each case there are repetitions making up the structure of the work within itself, as well as repetitions determining its multiple relations to what is outside it: the author's mind or his life; other works by the same author; psychological, social, or historical reality."²⁶

So is Gatsby right in claiming you can repeat the past? Yes and no. If the difference between past, present and the future does not exist he could restore his life with Daisy in 'the wink of an eye', positioning Daisy and himself in a discrete, probabilistic quantum spacetime. On the other hand, his life has gravitated towards a state of deep disorder, high entropy, and this fact obstructs the resurrection of the prior state of low entropy, the past, an orderly state of things that has become his idea of himself, as Carraway comments. The final obstacle to restoring the past is, then, Gatsby's idea of

himself, an idea that does not take change, entropy, into account.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Unconsoled* (1995) the I-protagonist, the pianist Ryder, has arrived in a central European city to give a concert. He checks into a hotel and notices something unexpected:

I was just starting to doze off when something suddenly made me open my eyes again and stare up at the ceiling. I went on scrutinizing the ceiling for some time, then sat up on the bed and looked around, the sense of recognition growing stronger by the second. The room I was now in, I realised, was the very room that had served as my bedroom during the two years my parents and I had lived at my aunt's house on the borders of England and Wales.²⁷

A state of low entropy, order, imposes itself on Ryder, or rather, is imposed on things by Ryder throughout the narrative. The scene in the hotel room is only the beginning of a process where the restoration of order is interceded and disrupted constantly by disorder and outright chaos so that Ryder never gets to perform the piano recital he has come to town to give. The result is an unmitigated mood of disconsolation. Ryder's keen observation of the ceiling causes the past to be repeated in a fatal but also comical way. The quanta of experience are united in one detector, as in the photon experiment that demonstrated interference. Ryder interferes with experience by interposing his view of the ceiling. This results in false optics.

Laus Strandby Nielsen's book of poetry *Halvvejs gennem uendeligheden* (Half-way through eternity, 2021) includes an untitled poem about time. Rendered in English translation:

²⁶Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, 2-3.

²⁷Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 16.

Time has been let go
and is tying
its own knots,
it is getting warmer
every day,
the beech is bursting into leaf,
so are the daffodils,
they shine like little suns,
the sun is shining
like a quite big sun,
the water sparkles and the air
tastes better
than it's done
for many years while
we hibernate.²⁸

The knots of time are quanta, grains, minimal intervals of time. Spring and winter interrelate here, becoming exchangeable. Spring when nature shines and light is penetrating everything in sight is also winter all of a sudden, for the 'I' or the 'we' of the poem is 'wintering', hibernating. During wintering, hibernating, one eye is closed, the other open and being is suspended in a state in-between, *inter-esse*, seeing yet not seeing spring and winter simultaneously.

Søren Kierkegaard's work *Repetition* (Gjentagelsen, 1843), authored by the pseudonym Constantin Constantius, is a quest to obtain a microscopic view of human nature, designed as a psychological experiment. The close-up of human character is intended to posit what Constantin refers to as 'the new', an innovative perspective uniting intuition, emotion and the intellect. The experiment encounters serious pitfalls as the over-all perspective on nature and the mind frequently relapses into a macroscopic view of the objects and human subjects, notably women who are excluded from the masculine quest.

Repetition: aesthetic entropy

The title page of the work *Repetition* reads: *Gjentagelsen. Et Forsøg i den eksperimenterende*

psykologi af Constantin Constantius. Repetition. An Attempted Experiment in experimental psychology by Constantin Constantius. The subtitle is important for the text by the pseudonym is exactly that: an experiment. Already in the title and the name we have a doubling, a repetition, for experimental psychology is being subjected to a test, an attempt, that amounts to an experiment in itself; and the name 'Constantin Constantius' also performs a doubling, a repetition where the first name indicates constancy to some degree while the surname may signify a higher degree of constancy and order. The question is, then, is the repetition manifesting itself in the surname something new, a change, or is it a repetition of the same? This question reverberates throughout the text the suprastructure of which is a repetition, a second repetition framed by an initial repetition. The issue is present from the very beginning where Constantin reports how Diogenes responded to the denial of motion proposed by the Eleates by walking back and forth without saying anything. The aesthetics of motion relates directly to the investigation into psychology proposed by Constantin, firstly because the author examines human psychology, especially the tendency to repeat the same thing without moving forward; and secondly by implying doubts as to the ability of language, literature, and epistemology to express something new, a truly second repetition, if indeed grounds for such an innovative repetition can be found. Keep in mind that Diogenes performed his demonstration without saying anything: "he really performed; for he didn't say a word."²⁹ From the beginning it is clear that the search for the new, whatever that is for it is never made clear what it might be, is a questionable pursuit perhaps doomed to failure. Media other than language, music and painting, might be better equipped to find and express 'the new'.

²⁸Nielsen, *Halvvejs gennem uendeligheden*, 11; the English translation is mine.

²⁹Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, bind 4, 9; English translations are mine.

Constantin involves himself, or rather involves the reader in a contradiction. He claims that “only he will be happy who does not delude himself imagining that repetition should be something new.”³⁰ which is contradicted later when Constantin says: “The dialectic of repetition is easy; because what is repeated, has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but the fact that it has been, makes repetition into the new.”³¹ Very well. But we still don’t know what constitutes the new or how it is new.

In “The end of time?” the physicist Jeremy Butterfield uses a concept of his own invention, Spontaneity, in describing how “the possible histories, in particular the actual one, jump about arbitrarily in the space of instantaneous states.”³² The scholar continues: “[...] a present observation is not checked against a previous prediction, but rather against a *present record* of what that prediction was.”³³

Constantin assumes he knows how repetition is the new and demonstrates his knowledge after he has met a young man who was passionately in love with a young woman but failed emotionally because he poetized the experience, turning the woman into a muse for his poetry. Constantin comments that the young man – who remains anonymous – would have ascended to a state of sincerity had he believed in repetition. Sincerity, then, is the new we are told, but the individual fails to perceive this. However, Constantin himself is seduced by illusion and by the theatrical. During a visit to Berlin he goes to the theater where he notes that the “magic of the theater” makes up “an artificial reality” that is aesthetically and psychologically attractive to the individual as it gives the person a chance to “split oneself in all possible differences from oneself, however so that each difference again is oneself.”³⁴

Constantin’s statement is ironic, or self-ironic, for he is split, not only in the theater but in real life. He admits to an infatuation with the young poet for he finds it attractive in the highest degree to observe someone who is passionately in love. It seems clear that the young man is Constantin’s Other, and this other Constantin is searching for sincerity by playing the role of young poet and lover. The psychological experiment deepens as Constantin betrays an inclination to be seduced through another, thus hoping to achieve sincerity vicariously, that is, by splitting himself as if he was a character on stage or a member of an audience caught up in the action of the drama. Returning home to Copenhagen he finds that his servant has started cleaning the house contrary to his orders and that his rooms have been turned upside down. He does not tolerate this advanced state of disorder. Yet he is, of course, also the author of the second repetition which consists of his own reflections and the young man’s letters addressed to him which he reads but does not respond to. Nor does the young man come to visit him at all. The distance between them is part of the theatrical performance instigated by Constantin, two texts written by ‘self’ and ‘other’ and separated by silence, or at the most by a hyphen. Dialogue is absent. We are reminded here of Diogenes who performed without saying anything – a positive demonstration of the futility of language. Contrary to Diogenes’ walking up and down which embodies motion Constantin’s walking up and down in the near prison of his house signifies stasis, standing still – repetition of the same. A reversal is taking place. Individual psychology; i.e., inescapable habits and inclinations, obstructs literature, here in the form of the tacit dialogue between Constantin and the

³⁰*Ibid.*, 10.

³¹*Ibid.*, 25.

³²Butterfield, “The end of time?” 26.

³³*Ibid.*, 27; my emphasis.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 30.

young poet that makes up *Repetition*, a work conceived by Kierkegaard as a narrative. The psychological experiment reveals its own clandestine intention: the purpose of psychology is to serve as a self-reflexive instrument creating an obstacle to existence. The repetition of the same seems to be innate.

The young man's letters are desperate and often hyperbolic. He casts himself in the role of Job, referring frequently to the Book of Job. The text of his letters is a manifestation of the aesthete who keeps life at a distance yet declares that he has finally regained himself, has become himself again. A letter dated September 19th begins with the words: "Job! Job! O! Job! Did you really not say anything else than these beautiful words: The Lord gave, the Lord took, praise the name of the Lord? Didn't you say anything else? Did you keep repeating them in all your agony?"³⁵ And: "Speak, raise your voice, speak loud, God can speak louder, he has the thunder."³⁶ In a subsequent letter the young poet writes: "I am waiting for thunder – and for the repetition. And yet, if only the thunder storm would come I would be glad and indescribably delighted even if the judgment would be that no repetition was possible."³⁷

The embracing of entropy as a process of progressive disorder may be facilitated by granting a primary role to the concept of the *moment* and to *music*. Thunder fuses the moment and music as it can be described as a momentary flash of sound and light from which emanates, possibly, a fundamental rhythm.

The moment and music

The young poet's dialogue with himself gains significance when examined in the context

of Vigilius Haufniensis' concept the moment, *Øieblik*, which is scrutinized in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Vigilius notes that "man is a synthesis of psyche and body, but he is also a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal."³⁸ He adds that the former synthesis includes a third factor, spirit, whereas the latter has only two factors, the temporal and the eternal. What might the missing factor be? The answer is *the moment* which Vigilius proceeds to define as "that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time."³⁹ Vigilius continues:

As long as the eternal is not introduced, the moment is not, or is only a *discrimen* (boundary). Because in innocence spirit is qualified only as dreaming spirit, the eternal appears as the future, for this is, as has been said, the first expression of the eternal, and its incognito. Just as (in the previous chapter) the spirit, when it is about to be posited in the synthesis, or, more correctly, when it is about to posit the synthesis as the spirit's (freedom's) possibility in the individuality, expresses itself as anxiety, so here the future in turn is the eternal's (freedom's) possibility in the individuality expressed as anxiety."⁴⁰

Vigilius now proceeds to analyze anxiety, *Angest*:

Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for

³⁵*Ibid.*, 66.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 67.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 81.

³⁸Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 90–91.

suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness.⁴¹

Vigilius' discussion of spirit, freedom and anxiety places the concept of repetition in a new light. The idea of the future and of the new as a distinct possibility is annihilated by Vigilius' argument. The 'new' supposedly manifesting itself in a repetition is exposed as a false possibility, an impossible vision of the future as a substitute for eternity and freedom. As the young man asks the question whether he did not gain himself doubly like Job, he is 'laying hold of finiteness' to support himself. Vigilius' concept of anxiety predates Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection as developed in *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* (1980). Kristeva comments:

The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an object, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I.⁴²

Kristeva adds: "[...] I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*."⁴³ The young poet's claim that he has gained himself, twice even, is designed to abrogate the experience (and the experiment) with human

psychology. Thus the experiment deteriorates into a repetition of the same. Abjection is anxiety and anxiety is the dizziness of freedom looking down into its own possibility. The individual approximates the highest level of entropy, disorder, as s/he is suspended in a state of spiritual vertigo. A genuine unfolding of time in eternity and eternity in time, the moment, is the spatiotemporal quantum fragment making up spacetime in *Gjentagelsen*. However, it is present in Constantin's work only as a potential or envisioned expression of freedom and spiritual fulfilment. In nature itself the spatiotemporal dimension is constituted by the minimal 'intervals of time' Rovelli points to in *The Order of Time*. Paradoxically perhaps, the (quantum) physics of nature accomplishes the spiritual *cum* psychological experiment initiated by Constantin. There is no discernible succession and no universality about time. There is only Vigilius' moment, an interval that suspends temporality briefly as eternity intervenes in the quantumphysical process by adding space to time, allowing them to merge momentarily.

The poet is waiting for thunder, the voice of God. Thunder may or may not contain rhythm, a beat. If indeed a beat may be detected in thunder we may begin to describe music, here the music of nature itself, as transcending and preceding language. We may possibly conceive of the music of thunder as a primary, pre-linguistic beat endowing the abyss of freedom with a modicum of structure.⁴⁴

Thunder appears in Part V of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) in "What the Thunder Said":

The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 61.

⁴²Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁴This emulation of rain and thunder by a choir will serve as an illustration: <https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/videos/choir-hands-thunderstorm/>.

DA

Datta: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of a moment's surren-
derWhich an age of prudence can never re-
tractBy this, and this only, we have existed.⁴⁵

The 'awful daring of a moment's surrender' was intended by Constantin to constitute the essence of the 'experiment'. However, Constantin does not surrender – he does not give himself up, nor does he give of himself and his failure to do so is extended into the second repetition where we may observe the young poet distancing himself from his loved one. The extension of the inability to give oneself up by drawing close to the beloved is a direct consequence of Constantin's inclination to look at young women from a distance, observing their moves while in hiding. Constantin's overt voyeurism contradicts the initial purpose, the *experiment* and the *experience* accompanying the experiment. The position of voyeur embraced by Constantin leads to a cognitive deferral and deflection in the young poet; the deflection becomes a distortion of the experiment and of experience, a distortion disguised as a complex aesthetic project where the beloved turns into a muse. Both Constantin and the poet express a decidedly masculine, i.e., chauvinistic point of view.

The Latin root of experiment and experience is the infinitive of the verb *experiri*, the noun being *experientia*. 'Experiri' means to try out, i.e. to conduct an experiment. The etymology of the word can be traced to the Latin adjective *peritus*, experienced, skilled, and to the noun *periculum* meaning danger. Engaging in experience and in an experiment involves exposing oneself to danger in other words; at the same time it means extracting oneself from

danger, as indicated by the prefix *ex*. The ambivalence of involvement with and extraction from danger may throw light on the aesthetic implications of the experiment in psychology, the purpose of which was to discover 'the new', supposedly located somewhere in the second repetition. The discovery is obviated by a false macroscopic perspective with psychotic undertones, an obsessive voyeurism that invades the narrative. Voyeurism is the extreme pole of scientific observation deflected from its own purpose by attributing a libidinal content to the object scrutinized. The women secretly spied on by Constantin are obscure objects of desire. The literary and the philosophical implications should not be lost on the reader even though Constantin does his utmost to conceal them. The visual mode is in the forefront here, vision and visual aesthetics being impaired and literally imperiled, subjected to danger, by a refusal to admit emotional closeness and the ensuing microscopic perspective to the province of cognition. The result is a fatal imperiling of the entire experiment.

Can the young poet be rescued from danger? The pertinent question in this connection is this: Is the thunder the poet is waiting for 'sound and fury signifying nothing' or is it music coming from a higher sphere, that is, an aesthetically and epistemologically *intrinsic repetition*? Repetition as music? I believe the text leaves this question open. The young man vacillates. He writes of a shadow following his 'Aands-Virkelighed', his real spirit,⁴⁶ and of "the Third Thing which no one knows wherefrom it came, that which touched me, hitting me and transforming me."⁴⁷ He even claims "I am myself again" and "the split in my being is gone". And then asks: "Is there not, then, a repetition? Did I not get everything double?"⁴⁸ – The ambivalence is obvious. He casts himself

⁴⁵ Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

in the role of Job once again, thus aestheticizing his existence. On the other hand, he may have heard the thunder, the voice exceeding the aesthetic. A voice commonly found in nature, in bird song and the song of certain whales – a voice originating in and emulating the heart beat and the pulse.

In the article “How music fixed “nonsense” into significant formulas: on rhythm, repetition, and meaning” Bruce Richman comments that “[...] the key is *regular expectancy* based on *repetition* and a regular beat; that is, on what are essentially *musical* dimensions.”⁴⁹ Musical beat may be conceived as being conducive to the ‘new’ in the second repetition of *Repetition*, and the text, which is essentially an intertext, strives to achieve this.

In Part One of *Either-Or* the pseudonymous narrator A writes: “Wherever language ceases, I encounter the musical” and “this is probably the most perfect expression of the idea that music everywhere limits language.”⁵⁰ In *A Question of Eros. Irony in Sterne, Kierkegaard and Barthes* John Vignaux Smyth comments that “the sensuous or musical *eros* of Christianity (ideally represented, according to A, in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*) is transgressive not merely in the conventional moral sense but also in a theoretical or semiotic sense.”⁵¹ A insists that “Don Juan should not be seen but heard”⁵² and proceeds to go to the extreme of placing himself outside the concert hall so that he may only hear not see the opera. The fictive editor of *Either-Or*, Victor Eremita, prefers hearing to seeing, writing that “just as the voice is the revelation of an inwardness incommensurable with the outer, so the ear is the instrument by which this inwardness is apprehended, hearing the sense by which it is appropriated.”⁵³ The question arises, now, whether the young

poet’s ear manages to appropriate ‘inwardness’ and this is again contingent upon whether he gets to hear the thunder and whether thunder qualifies as music. If we agree that thunder is music in some form and that the ear prevails over the eye then it would make sense to place the work *Repetition* within the framework of Kierkegaard’s entire *oeuvre*, letting the various pseudonyms comment on one another, as indeed it was Kierkegaard’s intention they should.

The inverse and the way of the text

In a letter addressed to an anonymous reader Constantin again upbraids the poet, that is, himself, arguing that if the young man had had a religious background he would not have become a poet, everything would have had a deeper significance and he would have won a ‘Bevidstheds-Faktum’, a ‘factual consciousness’. This statement has a false ring to it. Constantin writes the letter as an admonition to his audience, the Christian congregation, and the letter becomes the culmination of the inverse, the way of his text as he calls it. What is the inverse? The inverse is entropy. The double text containing two repetitions, one within the other, starts from a state of low entropy, that is, order – an order dictated by the ‘way’ of the text which is to impose structure. The second repetition is presented ambivalently as I have indicated, being the inverse of Constantin’s own text in that the poet’s letters exhibit a state of high entropy, a disorder which affords a glimpse, although an evanescent one, of the reality and truth of the mind and of nature. It should be clear at this point that Constantin is aware of the way of the text and of both texts since he has written them,

⁴⁹Richman, “How music fixed “nonsense” into significant formulas, 303.

⁵⁰Kierkegaard, *Either-Or*, 68.

⁵¹Smyth, *A Question of Eros*, 240.

⁵²Kierkegaard, *Either-Or*, 102.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 3–4.

splitting himself into self and other. It follows that the testimony 'I am myself' presented by the poet attests to losing the self, not gaining it. The unified self does not exist. At the root of things, nature and the mind, there is emptiness, *sunyata* which we may term the highest state of disorder possible. This emptiness is also form – form is emptiness, emptiness is form. How? Through recognizing the 'way' of the text we have before us: a repetition of an inwardness conceived as the intrinsic co-existence of form and emptiness; and this co-existence manifests itself as the voice of thunder. The inverse is also a reversal of cognition necessitated by the fact that truth may not be attained by direct communication, only by indirect communication. This is also the way of the text. Kierkegaard speaks through his own split self, using multiple pseudonyms to express the interrelatedness and interdependence of everything and to admit the force of entropy. The aesthetic is the foreground, the preliminary experiment letting in entropy through the backdoor.

The order of death

In Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Crossing* the sixteen-year-old boy Billy Parham, living on a farm with his parents in the New Mexico of the 1930's, frees a shewolf from a trap it was caught in and decides to return it to the mountains in Mexico it came from. Once across the border he is intercepted by Mexican police officers who impound the wolf, forcing it to take part in a pit game where she is chained to the ground while having to fend off fierce attack dogs. Billy decides to relieve the wolf from its pain and exhaustion by shooting it. He then exchanges his rifle for the dead wolf, carrying it on his horse to a burial ground in the mountains. On the way he encounters an old Mexican, ill in bed, who tells him of the

significance of the wolf, commenting that "El lobo es una cosa incognoscible" – the wolf is a thing unknown, and continuing:

He said that men believe the blood of the slain to be of no consequence but that the wolf knows better. He said that the wolf is a being of great order and that it knows what men do not: that there is no order in the world save that which death has put there. Finally he said that if men drink the blood of God yet they do not understand the seriousness of what they do.⁵⁴

The old Mexican comments further about the acts of men: "Between their acts and their ceremonies lies the world and in this world the storms blow and the trees twist and all the animals that God has made go to and fro yet this world men do not see."⁵⁵ – After Billy has laid the wolf down on the ground preparing to bury her he "sat by her and put his hand upon her bloodied forehead and closed his own eyes that he could see her running in the mountains, running in the starlight where the grass was wet [...]"; the wolf is part of the power of nature "which cannot be held never be held and is no flower but is swift and a huntress and the wind itself is in terror of it and the world cannot lose it."⁵⁶

A posthuman philosophy may be extracted from the story of the shewolf but the passages cited imply a lot more than that. They clearly indicate a human blindness to nature, a blindness that would turn any psychological or spiritual experiment into an intellectual sport leading nowhere – as indeed Constantin's experiment frankly does. Entropy, a high state of disorder as represented by the image of spin-foam, is the way of nature but not the way of Constantin's text. The double repetition is an attempt to hold that which cannot be held.

⁵⁴McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 45.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 127.

References

- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003. 60–62.
- Barbour, Julian. “Does time exist?” *Unimagazin Leibniz Universität Hannover*. 2012. https://www.uni-hannover.de/fileadmin/luh/content/alumni/unimagazin/2012_zeit/netz16_barbour.pdf.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften I–VI*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974–1985.
- Butterfield, Jeremy. “The end of time?” Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2001.
- Eliot, T. S. *The Waste Land*. In *Collected Poems 1909–1962*. London: Faber and Faber, 1974.
- Fitzgerald, F. S. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925.
- Foucault, Michel. *This Is Not a Pipe*. Translated by J. A. Harkness. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Unconsoled*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either-Or*. Translated by D. F. Swenson and L. M. Swenson. London: Oxford University Press, 1944.
- . *The Concept of Anxiety*. Translated by Reidar Thomte. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.
- . *Gjentagelsen*. Ed. N. J. Cappelørn et alia. *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter, bind 4*. København: G. E. C. Gads forlag, 1997.
- Kohl, Christian Thomas. *Buddhismus und Quantenphysik*. Aitrang: Windpferd Verlag, 2004.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Lanza, Robert. *Biocentrism*. Dallas: Benbella Books Inc., 2009.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *The Crossing*. New York: Vintage International, 1995.
- . *Stella Maris*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Nielsen, Laus S. *Halvvejs gennem uendeligheden*. København: Asger Schnacks Forlag, 2021.
- Proust, Marcel. *Remembrance of Things Past*. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. London: Wordsworth, 2006.
- Richman, B. “How music fixed “nonsense” into significant formulas: on rhythm, repetition, and meaning”. In *The Origins of Music*, edited by N.L Wallin, B. Merker, and S. Brown. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000.
- Rovelli, Carlo. *The Order of Time*. Translated by E. Segre and S. Carnell. London: Penguin Books, 2019.
- . *Helgoland*. Translated by E. Segre and S. Carnell. London: Allen Lane, 2021.
- Smyth, John Vignaux. *A Question of Eros: Irony in Sterne, Kierkegaard and Barthes*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986.

Copyright © 2024 Veisland.

Correspondence: Jørgen Veisland, e: jorgen.veisland@ug.edu.pl.

Received: 25 August, 2023.

Accepted: 3 November, 2023.

Financial statement: The scholarship for this article was conducted at the author's own expense.

Competing interests: The author has declared no competing interests.

How to cite: Veisland, Jørgen. "Entropy in literature and philosophy: time lost in Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition*." *Inscriptions* 7, no. 1 (January 2024): [33–49](#).